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United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Culture of peace

Elimination of racism and racial discrimination

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Non-governmental organizations

Letter dated 8 May 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Israel notes with satisfaction the recent decision of the Economic and Social Council on 3 May 2001 to adopt the report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations dated 22 February 2001 (E/2001/8), which recommended that the Hadassah organization be granted consultative status within the United Nations system.

We regret, however, that in the course of the Council's consideration of the report, a number of statements were made attacking Hadassah in particular, and Zionism and the State of Israel in general. Israel is deeply disturbed by these statements that single out one Jewish organization, one which embodies both the spirit and the values upon which the United Nations was established.

Founded nearly a century ago, Hadassah has a distinguished record of service to people in need, and indeed fulfils all the criteria for United Nations-recognized NGOs. Hadassah reaches out to all people, regardless of ethnic or religious background, and, in particular with regard to services for Palestinian Arabs, has provided essential health care and social services.

* A/56/50.
** E/2001/100.

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Hadassah's flagship institution, the Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem, has treated tens of thousands of Muslim, Jewish and Christian patients, some of whom have become spokespersons for Hadassah as a result of their appreciation. Hadassah's charities are among the most far-reaching in the world, and their openness to all who might benefit is at least equal to that of many NGOs.

Hadassah is also a major global force for countering racism, hatred and intolerance. The organization loudly condemns anti-Semitism in all its forms, speaks out against atrocities in places such as Bosnia and Rwanda, and works for the betterment of all peoples, in over 800 communities in the United States, and in more than 30 countries around the world.

Efforts to discredit and derail Hadassah's application, despite the organization's legacy of service, particularly in the health sector, are motivated by a broader opposition to Zionism. Moreover, the racist overtones, some overt and some more veiled, which have been directed at Hadassah represent deplorable attempts to revive one of the most appalling episodes in the history of the United Nations. Though the General Assembly officially revoked its infamous resolution of 1975 equating Zionism with racism, it remains commonplace for certain delegations to confer the ugly title of "racist" on the State of Israel and now, on its supporters as well.

Zionism, the eternal yearning of the Jewish people for its homeland despite millennia of dispersion, takes its name from the easternmost of the two hills of ancient Jerusalem. In the centuries of Jewish exile, the word "Zion", which is used 152 times in the Bible to refer to Jerusalem, became a powerful symbol for the entire land of Israel and of the Jewish longing to return. The inherent Jewish love and connection with its homeland in Zion is nearly as old as Judaism itself, one of the oldest established religions in the world from which two other great religions, Christianity and Islam, sprang forth.

Zionism was reincarnated as a national movement in the late nineteenth century precisely because of anti-Semitism and the oppression of the Jewish people that such bigotry engendered. Persecution of Jews reached its pinnacle in the ghastly form of the Nazi Holocaust in Europe, in the wake of which there was near-universal support for the Zionist cause. Support for the aims of Zionism was written into the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine and was endorsed by the United Nations in 1947 when the General Assembly voted by definitive majority for the restoration of Jewish independence in our ancient land.

To now question the Jewish people's right to national existence and freedom, or to label the exercise of that right as "racist", is not only to deny the Jewish people the same rights accorded to every other people on the globe, but also to deny the central precepts of the United Nations.

Just as we would not question the legitimacy of the cultural and religious heritage of others, we shall not remain silent while others work actively to discredit the Jewish people's deep and historic connection to our ancient homeland.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under items 37, 40 and 130 and of the Economic and Social Council, under item 12 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative